



Near the end of the war William Travis painted *Hard Earned Victory* to honor Union Major General Rosecrans and the battle at Stones River (above).
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Rivers and Railroads

I can never forget . . . that about the end of last year and the beginning of this, you gave us a hard-earned victory.

President Abraham Lincoln to Major General William Rosecrans, August 1863

Lincoln was worried as 1862 came to a close. Confederate attacks in Maryland and Kentucky had shaken Northern confidence. Generals McClellan and Buell wasted victories at Antietam and Perryville by refusing to advance on the Confederates. The Emancipation Proclamation was to take effect on January 1, but military success to enforce it seemed impossible. The Union war effort was stalled.

Lincoln needed a victory soon, and he pushed his generals to strike a blow. In December Gen. Ambrose Burnside's Army of the Potomac met with disaster at Fredericksburg, Virginia. General Grant's Army of the Tennessee proved unable to crack defenses north of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Lincoln's only hope lay with Gen. William S. Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland.

On December 26, 1862, Rosecrans led his army out of Nashville to seek the victory Lincoln demanded. Their target: Murfreesboro and Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee. From December 31, 1862, through

January 2, 1863, the armies ravaged each other. Each side lost nearly one-third of its men. The Confederates limped away from the battlefield. Rosecrans marched his battered Union army into Murfreesboro and declared victory.

Union forces held Murfreesboro and much of Middle Tennessee in an iron grip. Soon the earthen walls of Fortress Rosecrans protecting a vast supply base loomed over the town. Murfreesboro became a launching point for campaigns that slashed through the heart of the South and dealt a deathblow to the Confederacy.

The success at Stones River bolstered Northern spirits. Victory, and the Emancipation Proclamation, crushed Confederate hopes for international assistance and shifted the war's aims from restoring the Union to remaking the nation.

A relieved and grateful Lincoln thanked Rosecrans and his men for a "hard-earned victory which, had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have lived over."

The Plan to Win—Union Strategy in the West: Control Railroads, Rivers, and Ports



Union strategy was three-pronged: gain control of the Mississippi River, drive a wedge through the Confederacy along rivers and railroads across Tennessee and Georgia, and blockade major ports.

Victory at Stones River opened the way into the Confederate heartland. Union advances to Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Savannah crippled the South's ability to supply its armies and sapped civilian support for the war.

Key Commanders



Braxton Bragg, Confederate Commander, was "a puzzling mixture of competence and ineptness." He gained distinction in the US-Mexican War.

Bragg stayed in command despite his subordinates' criticism of his withdrawal from Murfreesboro. He defeated Rosecrans at Chickamauga but was routed at Chattanooga, a loss that cost him his command.



William Rosecrans, Union Commander, left the Army to work as an architect, mining engineer, and inventor. He rejoined at the outbreak of the war.

Rosecrans was popular with his troops, who called him Old Rosy. His "impulsive excitable personality" served him well at Murfreesboro but caused problems that led to his defeat at Chickamauga.

BOTH: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Highlights of the Civil War Era 1860–1877

Lincoln elected; seven states secede, Fort Sumter, SC, attacked; Civil War begins.
Nov. 1860–Apr. 1861

Confederate victory at First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), VA; shows war won't end quickly. July 1861

Union armies take Fort Donelson and state capital, Nashville, TN. Feb.–Mar. 1862

Union victory at Antietam, MD, war's bloodiest single day; 23,000 casualties. September 1862

Battle of Stones River; Emancipation Proclamation issued; US Colored Troops recruited. Dec. 1862–Jan. 1863

Union victories at Gettysburg, PA, and Vicksburg, MS; New York City draft riots. July 1863

Battles of Chickamauga, GA, and Chattanooga, TN; Gettysburg Address. Sept.–Nov. 1863

Union armies capture and burn Atlanta, GA; Sherman begins March to the Sea. May–Nov. 1864

Lincoln reelected; Union victories at Battles of Franklin and Nashville, TN. Nov.–Dec. 1864

Lee surrenders at Appomattox, VA; Lincoln assassinated. April 1865

13th Amendment ends slavery; 14th defines citizenship, protects civil rights; 15th allows male

citizens the right to vote regardless of race or color. Dec. 1865–Feb. 1870

US Army finally ends occupation of Tennessee. 1877

December 31, 1862

We were building fires and making coffee, for such permission had been granted just before daylight. . . . Suddenly a succession of long lines of Gray were swarming over the Confederate breastworks and sweeping toward us . . .

Sergeant Major Widney, 34th Illinois, USA, 1862

Confederates struck first, assaulting the Union right wing at dawn. By 10 am they had driven the Union through the cedar woods to the Wilkinson Pike. Only stubborn fighting in the Slaughter Pen prevented a Union rout.

Rosecrans rushed his troops into position along the Nashville Pike and the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad. Ordered to "contest every inch of ground," they beat back the

Confederates, inflicting heavy casualties. Bragg tried to revive his offensive by striking the Union left in the Round Forest. Soldiers from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio stood their ground and left hundreds of Confederates lying dead or wounded on Hell's Half Acre.

Wounded began filling field hospitals. A soldier from Ohio saw surgeons amputate limbs "then throw the quivering flesh into a pile."

The battle ended at dusk, but few felt like celebrating New Year's Eve. On January 1 both armies rested and prepared for the next onslaught.



January 2, 1863

There was a hill . . . on the left flank of the Federal army, which, could it be taken and held by Confederate forces, would necessitate the evacuation of the Federal position.

Major Pickett, Asst. Inspector General, CSA, 1863

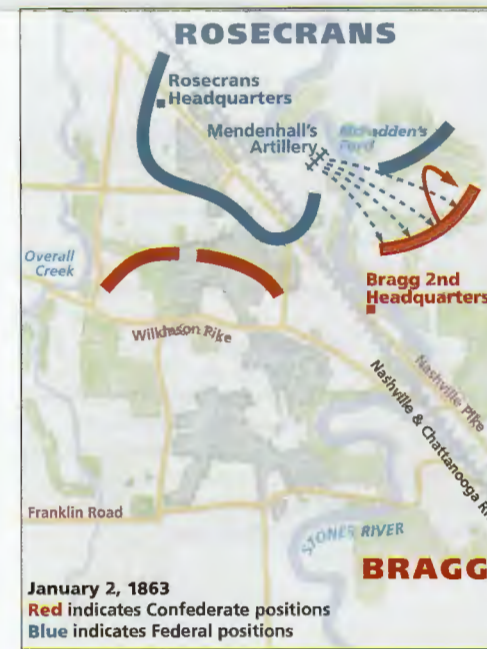
Bragg, confident that Rosecrans would withdraw, was surprised to find Union troops on a hill east of Stones River, threatening his right flank. Bragg ordered 4,500 men to seize the high ground and drive the enemy across the river.

The assault began in late afternoon, the Confederates gaining the crest. Union soldiers retreated down the back slope to a river crossing at McFadden's Ford. There pursuing Confederates encountered a deadly surprise.

Captain Mendenhall, supporting Union troops across the river, had 57 cannon aimed at the Confederates' approach.

Union gunners fired as enemy soldiers came into range, wounding or killing 1,800 in minutes. Confederates withdrew as Union troops crossed the river to reclaim the heights. Mendenhall's artillery turned a dashing charge into a deadly retreat.

The Battle of Stones River cost 13,249 Union casualties and 10,266 Confederate. Bragg left Murfreesboro and Rosecrans claimed victory, boosting northern morale. President Lincoln thanked Rosecrans and his soldiers for their "skill, endurance, and dauntless courage."



Life in Murfreesboro and on the Battlefield

Murfreesboro—Tennessee's state capital from 1818 to 1826—was a proud town. Early legislators included Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, and future Presidents Andrew Jackson and James Polk. By the 1850s Murfreesboro boasted schools, stores, churches, a railroad, nearby estates, and over 2,000 white residents. Many owned enslaved workers.

Spirits were high in December 1862. Local soldiers reunited with their families. Confederate President Jefferson Davis visited Murfreesboro with the hopeful, but incorrect, news that the Union army was starving in Nashville. Residents and soldiers celebrated the holidays with parties and dances, not realizing that the hard hand of war was about to strike their town.

Union forces occupied Murfreesboro after the battle. Soldiers tore down houses for lumber, destroyed churches, desecrated cemeteries, and confiscated supplies. Slaves flocked to Union camps to seize their freedom, leaving hundreds of farms untended. The Union occupation lasted beyond the war's end to 1877.



In the Midst of Cotton



The noise of battle was terrible. Southern boys advancing through a cotton field stuffed their ears with the white fibers as ear protection.

. . . cannon fire, shells bursting, men yelling, horses neighing, and wounded screaming made an awful crescendo.
Oscar Pinney, 5th Wisconsin Light Artillery, USA, 1863

Murfreesboro's rich agricultural district was the breadbasket of Middle Tennessee. Turnpikes and a railroad branching out from town carried goods to markets. Family farms worked by whites and enslaved blacks produced hogs, horses, corn, wheat, and cotton.

Scenes of downtown Murfreesboro and the courthouse, 1860s (left).

Women Do Their Part



During the war women worked in factories, hospitals, and schools. They struggled to keep their families together while husbands and sons fought and died.

In Murfreesboro women formed a soldier's relief society to support the hospital at

Union University (above).

Women took food, clothing, medicine, and other supplies to the front lines. They improved cleanliness in the camps and hospitals, saving thousands of lives.

The war separated families, many for the first time. Traveling photographers provided quick, inexpensive tintype photos as mementos. This woman holds a photo of a Confederate soldier, both unidentified.



TINTYPE OF YOUNG WOMAN—JENNIFER FAMILY COLLECTION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (ABOVE RIGHT); ALL OTHER IMAGES WPS, EXCEPT AS CREDITED.

Touring Stones River National Battlefield

Stones River National Battlefield preserves a small part of the original battlefield. You can reach points of interest on the self-guiding auto tour (*below and right*). Numbered markers identify stops. Events are explained along short trails and on exhibits. Please use caution when crossing highways. Cell phone tour: 585-797-0076.

Go out the back door of the visitor center. Look across the field where Union and Confederate soldiers fought. Imagine opposing armies totaling 81,000 men battling to control Middle Tennessee in one of the Civil War's bloodiest encounters.

Union troops made their final stand here, defending the Nashville Pike and railroad—both vital lines of supply. Today's scene differs little from 1862. The railroad and pike are in the same place, and fields are now planted with native grasses between cedar thickets.

- 1 Eve of Battle** On December 30, after Rosecrans's Union army arrived at Murfreesboro, troops occupied this area along McFadden's Lane. Soldiers struggled to sleep in the freezing mud without campfires, knowing a major battle was imminent. For thousands, that night would be their last.

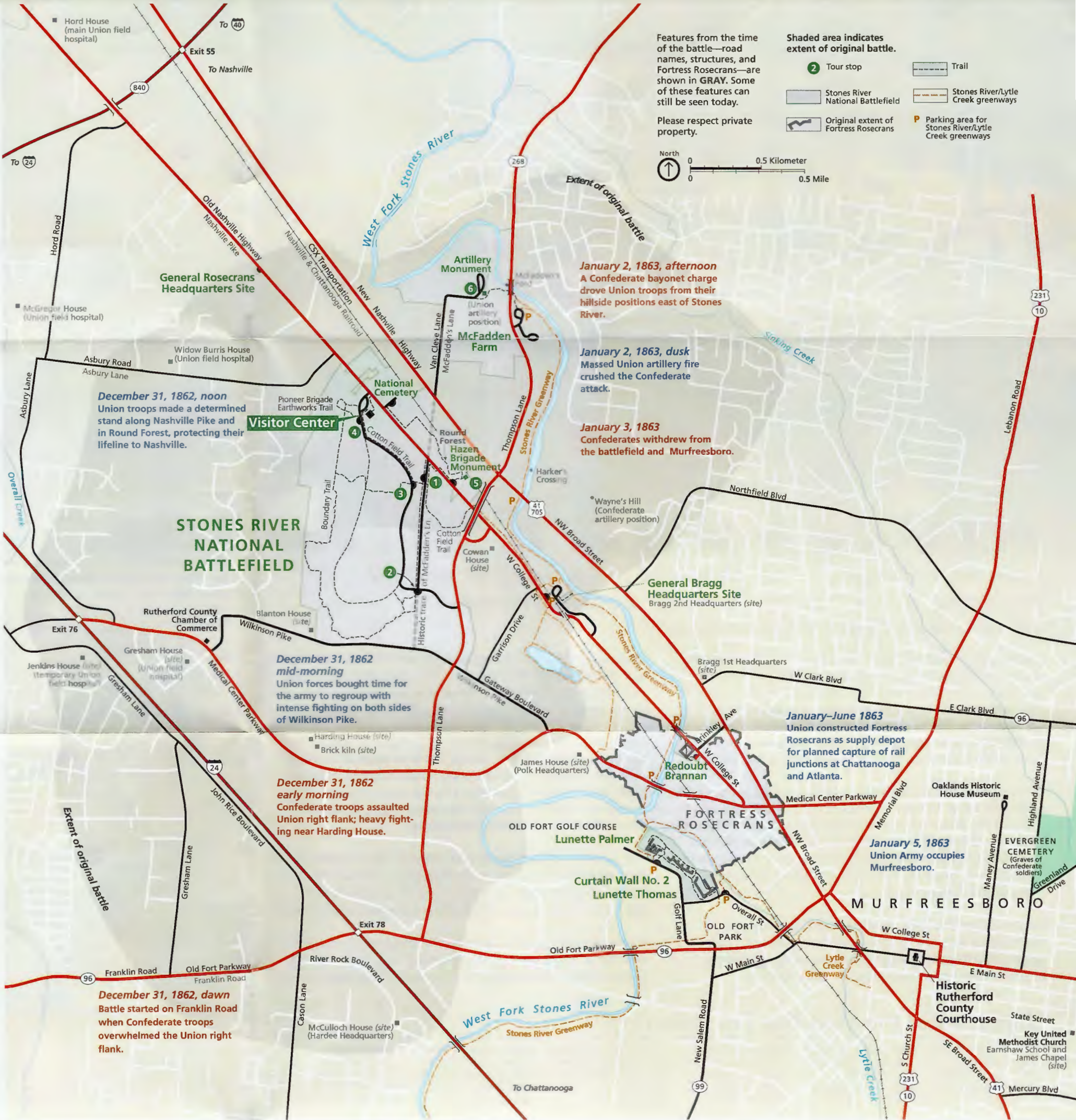
2 Slaughter Pen Union soldiers fiercely defended their position here. Confederates launched attack after failed attack, causing heavy losses to both sides. Bodies piled up in the rocks, and blood soaked the ground. Union soldiers retreated, but the delay gave their army time to form a new line along the Nashville Pike.

3 Cotton Field On December 31 Union troops established a defensive line along the Nashville Pike. Pursuing Confederates entering the cotton field were greeted by cannon fire. A Texan recalled, "the artillery opened up on us . . . and it seemed that the heavens and the earth were coming together." At dark both sides dug in for the night. Rosecrans's army had been pushed back three miles, but the Confederates had failed to capture the pike.
- 4 Defending Nashville Pike** Thousands of retreating Union troops burst from the cedars in front of these cannon, followed by Confederates. The Chicago Board of Trade Battery sprang to action as the Pioneer Brigade poured volley after volley into the gray ranks. Canister charges forced the Confederates back to the cedars.

5 Round Forest This was the only Union position that held throughout the first day. Artillery and infantry halted the first attack at 10 am and beat back three more as the day wore on. By dusk the fields of Hell's Half Acre were covered with Confederate dead and wounded.

6 McFadden Farm Union soldiers hid behind stone and rail breastworks as men fled across the river chased by Confederates. Union cannon firing from above McFadden's Ford halted the Confederates with shot, shell, and canister, killing and wounding over 1,800 men in less than an hour. This was the battle's final action.

©GPO:2015—388-437/0091 Last updated 2013
Printed on recycled paper



Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center The visitor center has information, museum exhibits, a film, and bookstore. It is open daily except Thanksgiving Day and December 25. For details about activities, special events, and hours, contact park staff or visit www.nps.gov/stri.

There's a Lot to See Here You can see part of Fortress Rosecrans in Old Fort Park on Highway 96. Redoubt Brannan is on West College Street. Paved trails lead to the earthworks. Stones River and Lyle Creek greenways offer places for activities and the chance to see important battle sites. Don't miss the Hazen Brigade and Artillery monuments, the National Cemetery (Union), or Evergreen Cemetery (Confederate). Ask at the visitor center about historic sites and places to see in Murfreesboro (see map).

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For more information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Safety and Regulations Please be careful. Remember, your safety is your responsibility.

- Stay on marked trails. Watch for exposed roots, uneven ground, poison ivy, ticks, and slippery rocks.
- Pets must be attended and leashed.
- Do not climb or sit on cannon.
- Relic hunting and climbing on earthworks are strictly prohibited.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by federal law.
- For firearms and other regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

Emergencies call 911

More Information
Stones River National Battlefield
3501 Old Nashville Highway
Murfreesboro, TN 37129-3094
615-893-9501
www.nps.gov/stri

Stones River National Battlefield is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov

A Fortress Like No Other

Fortress Rosecrans

In 1863 Rosecrans's army and hundreds of formerly enslaved men built a depot and fort at Murfreesboro to distribute weapons, food, and supplies. Fortress Rosecrans had three miles of earthworks enclosing storehouses, powder magazines, and four interior redoubts (small forts), including Redoubt Brannan.

The 200-acre fort could shelter 15,000 troops, and its stores could supply an army of 65,000 men for months. Its strategic location allowed the Union army to attack the Confederate rail center in Chattanooga and split the Confederacy along transportation routes in Tennessee. This fort was the largest enclosed earthen fortification built during the war.



Black Men in Blue Uniforms

Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U-S, let him get an eagle on his button . . . and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States.
Frederick Douglass

By war's end United States Colored Troops made up 10 percent of the Union Army. Over 20,000 formerly enslaved men from Tennessee chose to fight for their freedom. Several units formed or served at Murfreesboro.



Keeping Memories Alive

Hazen Brigade Monument

Colonel William Hazen's men were the only Union soldiers who didn't retreat during the fighting on December 31. They repelled attacks so horrible that soldiers named the place Hell's Half Acre. Over 400 of Hazen's troops fell in the battle, and the survivors didn't want the world to forget. Hazen's men built this monument in 1863. It is one of the oldest Civil War memorials (*below*).

Stones River National Cemetery

After the battle most Union and Confederate dead were quickly buried on the field. In 1865 soldiers of the 111th US Colored Infantry began the grim job of reburial. Union dead in the new Stones River National Cemetery. Each mound in the 1866 photo (*below*) is the grave of a newly buried soldier. Over 6,100 Union soldiers are buried here, 2,500 of them unknown.

Evergreen Cemetery

About 2,000 Confederates are buried in Confederate Circle at Evergreen Cemetery in Murfreesboro. For many, first buried on the battlefield, this was their third resting place.

In 1867 their remains were moved to a cemetery south of Murfreesboro. In the 1890s they were moved again, this time to Evergreen Cemetery (*monument below right*).

The Community of Cemetery

After the war, 111th US Colored Infantry soldiers, including William Holland (*tombstone below right*) and other formerly enslaved people, started a new life in the area around the national cemetery (*residents below*). They built homes, a school, churches, and a store. Their community, named Cemetery, endured until 1927 when creation of the national battlefield park uprooted many residents, beginning a history of decline.

Touring by Rail

Battle sites became tourist attractions after the war. Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway excursions to Stones River brought tourists—and much needed dollars—to Murfreesboro. Signs along the tracks helped passengers imagine the bloody actions. In 1890 the railway published *Southern Battlefields* with battle accounts and maps showing rail lines near battlefields (*below right*).

Artillery Monument

Artillery Monument marks the battle's final attack on January 2. Here 57 Union cannon fired upon the approaching Confederates, killing or wounding 1,800 men in a short time. In 1906 the railway built this 34-foot-tall monument (*below*) so that passengers could see it from their train windows—and offered special fares for Confederate veterans.

